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ABSTRACT

This paper and community guide is based on the recommendations of a panel of nongovernmental experts who systematically reviewed the current research on the family's role in reducing substance abuse among youth. This booklet answers questions such as: (1) "Why focus on families?"; (2) "How big is the problem? What are the facts?"; (3) "What puts children at risk for substance abuse?"; (5) "What protects children from substance abuse?"; (6) "How do we know what works?" It provides lists of "What you can do!" for parents and community members. The recommendations are intended to enhance local efforts to reduce substance abuse by minors. (EMK)

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Prevention Enhancement Protocols System (PEPS)

KEEPING CHILDREN DRUG FREE: USING FAMILY-CENTERED APPROACHES

Parent and Community Guide

Second in a Series

Department of Health and Human Services
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention

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This parent and community guide is based on the recommendations of a panel of nongovernmental experts who systematically reviewed the current research on the family's role in reducing substance abuse among youth. The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration offers these recommendations in the hope that they will enhance local efforts to reduce substance abuse by minors.

Family Involvement Is Key To Stopping Substance Abuse!

Families play *the most important role* in determining how children handle the temptations to use alcohol, cigarettes, and illegal drugs.

Typically, substance abuse prevention programs for youth are part of school efforts, public television campaigns, or local police initiatives.

But a new effort is starting in many communities. It focuses on preventing substance abuse by helping families. Be a part of it from the very first step!

We all need to work together:

- *Parents* who want to protect their children from experiences that may lead to substance abuse
- *Teachers, social workers, nurses, and others* worried about children who are under stress and have troubles at home

- *Community members* who want to build a neighborhood that helps families keep their children drug free
- *Public health and substance abuse prevention practitioners* who can bring the latest knowledge of what works and what doesn't—along with some money to help the community develop a plan of action

Why Focus on Families?

School and community programs to prevent substance abuse are essential—but they are not sufficient. Frequently, schools do not begin addressing the problem of substance abuse until the high school years. Yet substance abuse often begins in the elementary and middle school years.

If families are to succeed in preventing substance abuse by children, many parents and children need to develop new behaviors and skills. Family-centered programs like the ones described here offer training and support for families as they face the challenge of keeping their children free from drugs.

The patterns of substance abuse become worse in the high school years. And those who begin using alcohol or tobacco when they are very young are more likely to use them later in life.

How Big Is the Problem? What Are the Facts?

Many adolescents say they began experimenting with substances when they were children. Unfortunately, we don't have much information on the extent of drug abuse

among children. But surveys of youth tell a frightening story. For example, according to the Federal Government's 1997 *Monitoring the Future Study*, by the time they reached the eighth grade:

- *Alcohol*—More than 54 percent of the children surveyed had tried alcohol.
- *Tobacco*—Forty-seven percent had tried cigarettes.
- *Marijuana*—Twenty-three percent of eighth graders had smoked marijuana at least once and 10 percent smoked it within the past 30 days—up from 3 percent in 1991. Also, kids find it's easy to get and think it's safe to use.
- *Inhalants*—Twenty-one percent had experimented with inhalants. Inexpensive and easily found in products such as glue, aerosols, and solvents, these dangerous substances are most often abused in early adolescence.

What Puts Children at Risk for Substance Abuse?

Three types of *risk factors* increase the chances that children will turn to alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs:

- *Child risk factors*, such as serious behavior problems, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), violent acting out, alienation, or rebelliousness
- *Family risk factors*, such as communication difficulties, too much or too little discipline, parents' use of substances, and child abuse or neglect

- *Environmental risk factors,* such as peer rejection, lax enforcement of purchase-by-minors laws, extreme poverty, neighborhood crime, and failure to do well in school

Risk factors are more likely to lead to drug use if:

- They occur or begin in early childhood and continue through adolescence
- Children are exposed to several risk factors at the same time

What Protects Children From Substance Abuse?

Not all children—even those exposed to many risk factors over a long period of time—will develop substance abuse problems. They seem to be protected by certain conditions that researchers call *protective factors,* which also occur in three areas of life:

- *Child protective factors,* such as a positive attitude, an ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and a belief in one's ability to "handle things"
- *Family protective factors,* such as a close-knit family, warmth, consistent discipline, and parental supervision of children's daily activities
- *Environmental protective factors,* such as close friends, an extended family that provides support, community resources that families can turn to for help, and family and community attitudes that do not tolerate substance abuse

Protective factors can decrease the harm caused by some risk factors and can prevent certain risks from developing into problems.

The more you reduce risk factors and increase protective factors, the more likely you are to succeed in preventing drug abuse among children.

How Do We Know What Works?

Three family-centered approaches have shown great potential for success:

- *Parent and Family Skills Training* teaches parents how to enhance protective factors and reduce risk factors tied to substance abuse.
- *Family In-Home Support* provides crisis intervention (such as food, clothing, and shelter) and long-range training to help solve the problems that caused the crisis.
- *Family Therapy* helps family members improve the way they relate and talk to one another, the way they manage family life, and the way they solve problems.

What You Can Do!

As a Parent:

- Talk with your own kids about the dangers of substance abuse.
- In times of crisis, use community programs for emergency support.
- Participate in programs that help you improve your parenting and family management skills.

As a Member of the Community:

- Join in community efforts. Attend planning meetings.
- Make substance abuse prevention among children and adolescents a high priority in the community.
- Focus on families with young school-aged children.
- Speak up. Ask questions. Express your concerns. Share ideas and problems.
- Sign up. Put your name on the line. Let program organizers know about your special interests and talents. There are many ways you can help. For example:
  - Help gather information to identify the problems faced by local families and the community.
  - Make sure all cultural groups in your community are included in prevention efforts.
  - As practitioners plan prevention programs, make sure they really listen to parents' goals and expectations.
  - Identify and take action on obstacles that might prevent parents and children from participating.
  - Serve as support staff and community trainers.
  - Set up and publicize incentives for participation in family-centered prevention efforts, such as free transportation and child care, snacks or meals, "graduation" gifts, and parties or family outings.

— Participate in the programs you help develop. After graduating from a program, contact dropouts, and help motivate others to participate.

The more you and other families are involved in planning and decisionmaking, the more likely programs in your community are to protect children from drug use.

Success Is Possible.
Be Part of It!

For more information on how to get involved, call your State drug or substance abuse agency or the National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information at 1-800-729-6686. Many other free publications are also available.

Thank you for your interest!
Together, we will make a bright future for our young people.

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Center for Substance Abuse Prevention

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Parent and Community Guide

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Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
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